Volume 8, Issue 51   Atari Online News, Etc.   December 22, 2006

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe,
log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org
and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org
and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to
subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the
following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

```
    ~ Seasons Greetings All! ~ People Are Talking!    ~ New mmSAP Update!

    ~ MSX Emulator Source!   ~ Santa Not Welcome Here ~ New tos.hyp Version!
    ~ Opera Phishing Filter! ~ New Studio Son Beta!    ~ Improve Your Spinnish!
    ~ New Mup for MiNT Out!   ~ PC Data Held Captive!  ~ 'Big Yellow' Attacks!

                    -* It's Spam for the Holidays!  *-
                  -* Windows, IE Animations Running Amok *-
              -* Video Gamers Share Their Pain and Mishaps! *-




                              =~=~=~=



->From the Editor's Keyboard              "Saying it like it is!"
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""
```

Well, here we are, the last night of Hanukkah upon us, and Christmas rapidly
approaching. If you're not prepared by now, the clock is ticking! My wife
is out right now, picking up those last-minute items that we forgot or just
didn't find during earlier shopping treks. There will be a few items that
will have to wait until after the holidays, though. After seeing commercials
on television with the family playing virtual golf on the Nintendo Wii, I had
to have it!! Alas, trying to find one of those consoles would involve an
incredible miracle. And, I refuse to pay an exorbitant price gouge on a
place like eBay or Amazon. So, I'm hoping to be able to pick one up within
the next couple of weeks - my golf game will get rusty due to inactivity!

I'm sure Joe will likely mention this, but this is a great time of year for
most people. The period from Thanksgiving to New Years Day seems to be a
time for terrific opportunity for family and friends to get reacquainted.
Over the past month, I've talked (or corresponded in some other manner)
with friends that I haven't seen in awhile. One of my post-college
roommates, who has long since moved to Maine, was on my mind the other day.
We exchange Christmas cards, and he always writes some typical nonsense
inside his cards (my wife always exclaims that he's strange because of these
musings). But, I understand them, and always start to think about the great
times we had as roommates and beyond. Every time I go to Maine, I mean to
stop by and visit, but never do. When I get his holiday card, I keep saying
that I have to call, but don't. This year, I called. He was working,
but I talked with his wife for about an hour. I can't believe how much
time has passed. One of their sons has already graduated from college and
living in the Boston area! Time goes by too quickly! My old roommate
called me back in a couple of days, and we talked for a long time, getting
caught up on each other and our families. Yes, we've changed physically,
and our lives have progressed, but it felt like it did when we were younger.
For a couple of hours, time stood still. Since then, I've called a number
of the "old gang" and shared even more tales. Yes, we've all seemed to have
moved on to new lives and different locations, but all it takes is a letter
or phone call to get close again. I need to do this more often!

So, while everyone tries to finish up their holiday shopping and various
other preparations, I'm going to relax and enjoy the time leading up to
the long holiday weekend. There is no snow predicted for the extended
forecast, so no chance for the weather [here] to disturb me. Want snow,

head north and west - they'll be more than happy to share it with you. I
don't worry about celebrating the holidays without any of that white stuff
on the ground!

All of us here at A-ONE wish you and yours a terrific holiday. We hope
that Hanukkah Harry and Ol' Saint Nick bring you plenty of terrific toys
this year (forget about the clothes, I still like "fun stuff"!). And
please remember to celebrate responsibly. While I always enjoy celebrating
with various kinds of Christmas 'cheer', I do so in a manner that will not
adversely affect anyone else. I plan to be around to see what the new year
will bring - so should you.

Until next time...

                                =~=~=~=

                  Source Code of MSX Emulator for ST Released

The MSX Resource Software Foundation (www.msx.org) has notified, that
the source code of the MSX emulator for Atari ST/TT/Falcon has been
released by its author, Folkert van Heusden. The emulator was
originally written in GFA Basic in 2000. Now, also the source code has
been made available for public.

URL: http://www.vanheusden.com/atari_st/

                        tos.hyp Version 4.96

Hi,

the new version 4.96 of tos.hyp is available.

There is an html and a st-guide version, both in english and german
available. The archives are present at chapilie.rma.ac.be

There are also online versions available:
english at http://toshyp.atari.org
german at atari.mbernstein.de/prog/tos

Note that not all part are translated from german to english. The
english version contains parts which are still on german.

Best regards
Michael Bernstein

                        mmSAP 1.4 Released

New, improved version of SAP player for GNU/Linux comes with new
features.

- Playlist added (!)

- ALSA variant uses less CPU power

- Four playlist pass modes

- Various bugfixes

http://www.baktra.wz.cz/english/mmsap.html

                    Studio Son 2.091 beta FR & UK

This new release is the result of six months of irregular but always
intense work. The audio editor for Atari Falcon becomes more and more
stable and reliable with this 2.091 beta version. Many bugs of general
use have been fixed.

Studio Son 2.091b is available in the wonderful french language:
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/studioson/std2091b/STD2091F.ZIP

BUT Studio Son is back in English !
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/studioson/std2091b/STD2091E.ZIP

You can, of course, find the classic 68030 and 68030+68882 versions in
these archives.

I have performed a lot of hard tests to check the quality of my
algorithms. I have written a lot of different DSP and C programs to
obtain correct results. But, it is still a beta version, so be careful
with your samples !

This version has been tested with an original Falcon 030 with a 68882
coprocessor. The CT60 card is not officially supported.

Bugs fixed:

- Crashes when filtering under Magic fixed.
- For a resample process under Magic, internal file management fixed.
- Significative noise reduction of plopping sounds as long as you use
  Studio Son.
- Management improved of AIFF files compatible with Cubase Audio. These
  files are now saved with a physical size rounded to 1024 bytes
  multiples. Useful to prevent crackling noise when you import your AIFF
  files with Cubase Audio.
- Buggy "Scrub" function rewritten. No crash occurs.
- Reverse stereo bug for a "Scrub" fixed but still in beta test mode.
- Buggy "Cross Fade" function improved. Autocorrection for wrong
  parameters. The UNDO is also correct.
- Cut, Copy, Paste, Insert and others have their UNDO bugs fixed.
- Bug of the current working folder fixed. (After an Insert for example)
- DSP effect after a Resample and Filtering is now restored with no
  problem.
- Overall settings saving are now re-enabled ! Up to date, you MUST keep
  the STUDIO.SYS folder.

- Rewritten "New Sound File" function. You can now create a file with
  the fileselector, choose a frequency, ...
- Rewritten "Apply Effect" function. Sample gap subtly fixed. Due to the
  DSP real time application of this function, it is obvious that it
  remains a very small gap into your final sample. This gap is usually
  filled by zero values as it has been thought for this rewritten
  function.
- Markers management bugs fixed. (Delete, saving and loading procedures)
- There was play error with "Preview Cut" function. It's now okay.
- Block selection with SHIFT+TAB to the next marker has been debugged.
- Sample time length is now updated after any UNDO.
- Little bug fixed during a play actived by the space bar with an
  exported sample from Studio Son.
- Many another minor bugs.

New features and bugs fixed:
(since 2.09b version)

- Resampling function added (Linear Interpolation).
- Resampling function includes a filter and linear interpolation code in
  only one DSP program.
- You can resample from 2 Khz to192 Khz.
- WAV files opening issue fixed.
- Huge undo bug fixed.
- Huge bug of the volume of mono samples filtered fixed.
- FIR filters (Low Pass, High Pass, Band Pass and Band Reject) up to
  2048 coefficients.
- Resample process can be followed by a LowPass filter up to 1024
  coefficients.
- DSP Filter algorithm improved. The speed of the treatment have been
  increased. Now you can enjoy a good optimization of the filtering
  process.
- The end of the sample is now truly filtered.
- Vu meter clipping problems fixed.
- The cursor running is now correct when sample frequency is not the same
  as the system frequency.
- Desktop background pattern modified to improve the work in monochrome.
- Redraw bug of the desktop in monochrome corrected.
- Several dialog boxes fields bugs fixed in monochrome.
- Crashes at very high zoom levels fixed.
- You can now really select all the sample with the mouse.
- You can now really place the cursor at the end of the sample with the
  mouse.
- Wrong size of the blocks at the end of the sample corrected.
- You can now create a block with a "one sample" size when you make a
  long click on a part of the sample.
- New alert boxes for the Filtering and Resampling function.
- New internal undo for the Resampling function.

New function "Resample..." allows you to change the frequency of your
samples with a linear interpolation and an optional Low Pass filter.
The "Filtering..." function enables you to carry out FIR filters (Low
Pass, High Pass, Band Pass and Band Reject).
This is performed by the DSP 56001 and with Direct to Disk process.

Known bugs:

- Several internal DSP effects can sometimes result in a reverse stereo
  mode, take care of this.
- No sound when playing very high frequency samples.
- Slowly WAV files opening.
- Selected block after a resampling task is not deleted.
- Sample duration and time counter are wrong when the system frequency
  doesn't match with the sample frequency.
- You can hear some noise when playing WAV files at fast speeds.
- Unable to reduce physically the size of a sample when you cut blocks.
- Make an undo after the "Replace" function have no effect.
- A lot of useful alert boxes need to be added.
- In the time counter, the value 99 is followed by 10.
- Several little bugs into the sample window.
- The icon of the function "Generate Low Frequencies" differs with the
  colour of the resolution.
- Little bugs of sample drawing.
- Random error messages when filter steepness is very low.
- It might remain some english translation errors.

If you are using Studio Son on a single TOS, I strongly recommend the
launch of ARROWFIX.PRG in the AUTO folder:
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/studioson/std2091b/arrfix15/

If you are using NVDI, just run ARROWFIX.PRG after this.
Otherwise, GEM must be copied in RAM with the program GEMRAM.PRG before
running ARROWFIX.PRG:
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/studioson/std2091b/GEMRAM16/

If you have troubles to run Studio Son under Magic, you can use the
patch DSPSLOW1.PRG by Centek included into the package or you can find it
here:
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/studioson/std2091b/DSPSLOW1.PRG
Don't run DSPSLOW1.PRG if you launch Studio Son under TOS otherwise you
might have display or DSP locked issues.

You can also use the nice DSPXBIOS patch by Didier Mequignon:
http://perso.wanadoo.fr/didierm/files/dspxbios.zip
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/studioson/std2091b/dspxbios.zip

If you use an external clock, run FDI_INIT.PRG into the AUTO folder:
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/studioson/std2091b/FDI_INIT.PRG

FPATCH2.PRG is now included in the package.

You can also download self-extracting STZIP unpacker:
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/stzip26/STZIP26.TOS

Have fun !

Yvan Doyeux

And Happy 80th Birthday Granny !

                        Mup 5.3 for MiNT Release

Hi Atarians,

The latest version of Mup - the powerful Music Notation software from
Arkkra Systems (http://www.arkkra.com) - is now available as SpareMiNT
RPM package. You can download it from here:

http://www.home.zonnet.nl/m.tarenskeen/download/mint/mup-5.3-1.m68kmi...

Have fun !

--

Martin Tarenskeen

=~=~=~=

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, this is it... Christmas is almost
here. If I don't get the rest of my shopping done in the next couple of
days, it's just not going to get done. [grin]

Yeah, I'm the kind who's got to feel the deadline pressing in on him to
get anything done. I've always been that way. It usually works out okay
for me, and I find that the 'under the gun' type of feeling actually
helps me get things done in less time... at a LATER time, to be sure..
but the amount of time actually spent doing whatever task is at hand is
almost always decreased.

Truth be told, it used to drive my wife crazy. She couldn't understand
how I could know that a particular deadline was approaching and still
not take steps to complete whatever task was at hand. She's resigned
herself to the fact that it's just the way I am, and that whatever task
we're talking about WILL be completed to everyone's satisfaction by the
deadline. She doesn't even question it anymore. That, in and of itself,
is amazing. [grin]

So, here I sit at... hmmm... ten minutes after one in the morning,
typing out the column, knowing that I've got to get up in the morning
with a full plate of things to be done. Actually, I'm looking forward
to it, and I'll complete the tasks I've set out for myself right on
time.

We had an old friend... my best friend from high school... over for
dinner tonight. We had a very nice dinner (which I cooked), several
mugs of ale, and a lot of conversation.

Y'know, all of my friends are important to me, but it's true that there
are no friends like old friends.

Only about half of all this conversation was spoken. Much of it was
starting a train of thought and letting the other one pick up on it and
remember the occurrence or whatever. Just a word or two to a close
friend can set in motion a cascade of thoughts and memories that would

take much more talking to get across to anyone else.

We're kind of like that here in the Atari world too. Just mention a
"drop test" or "Spectrum512 Jitters" or any of a dozen or so other
peculiarities specific to the ST computers, and you'll know instantly
whether or not anyone in that group ever had an ST. As far as I'm
concerned, that was always the cool thing about the Atari world. It was
small enough that there was a real feeling of community, large enough
to give it some recognition in the 'real world', and new enough that we
all felt like we were on the leading edge of technology. Them was the
days, eh, Hector?

You have no way of knowing this, but it's now five hours later than it
was in the above paragraphs. Yep, the old eye lids started drooping and
the thoughts were even more muddled than usual, so I decided to get
some shut-eye. So now that I'm a little more awake, I guess there're
only a couple of things left for me...

First of all, please be careful on the road this holiday season. You
know the drill... watch out for the other guy, wear your seatbelt,
observe the speed limit, and don't drink and drive. Remember, the life
you save may be MINE!

Second, please consider donating money, food items, or a little bit of
time to your local food share or homeless shelter. How does it go?...
'It's at this time of year that the need is most keenly felt', or
something like that? Well, there are a lot of ways to help out, and I'm
sure that I haven't thought of even a small percentage of them, so pick
your way to help and just do it.

If you don't, I'm going to have Santa's elves show up at your house in
the middle of the night and pull up your shrubs and kick your dog.
[chuckle]

Well, let's get on with the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
====================================

'Phantomm' asks about the Falcon's floppy drive:

"It may seem a silly question, but what should the Step Rate be
set to for the internal 1.44 disk drive in the Atari Falcon?

(I believe it's 6, but not sure.)

Also, would this be the same on all internal and external 1.44
Atari disk drives such as in the Mega STE?

And does any copy protection make use of the Step Rate
in the protection?

Apex Media has some weird copy protection on the disks
before they are registered and am curious if anyone knows
how to back it up?

Reason is I had one set of disks get damaged during setup.
And I think it may be due to the wrong Step Rate set, as

the drive went nuts with the installation disk.
Seems fine on other original disks.

I'd hate to mess up this other original Apex, by using the
wrong backup system. The Apex Manual warns of
damage to the disks if trying to back them up.
But I don't see how.... As long as they are not
written to.

I have another original Apex set, that I'd like to backup, before
setting up just in case. Any ideas?"

'Coda' tells Phantomm:

"Step rate is just the wait time between the head moving from one track
to another. Its meant to give the head time to settle before
reading/writing. The step rate is set by a byte in the bootsector. The
legal values for this I believe are 2,3,6 and maybe 12ms. I think 6 and
12 are used on 5.25" drives. Good 3.5" drives can be set to 2ms no
problem. On not so good drives, or drives that are nearly 20 years old!
- if the step rate is set too small, then you risk not being able to
read that disk properly again. You could use a sector editor to change
the step rate to a higher value (I recommend only 3ms - and don t do
this on a disk with a bootable bootsector!) and then try reading it
again.

Step rate has nothing to do with copy protection. If you backed up the
disks with a sector copier (like FCOPY) then apart from the information
that s in the sector gaps, the disks will be identical, including the
step rate. If you tried copying the disks with GEM or dragging the
files across to disk B... well you know that would be daft.

If your original media got damaged then maybe either your floppy drive
is dodgy, or the apex is doing something strange because of the Mega
STe hardware. Don't forget - a lot of ST games failed on the new STe
computers when they came out, one of the reasons was hardware (like the
shifter) differences, but many also because the copy protections
failed."

Thomas Wellicome adds:

"I seem to remember with Apex you had to register the program on the
disk and then you could back it up as normal, I seem to remember trying
to back it up before I registered and it damaged the disk as has
happened with yours.."

Guillaume Tello adds his thoughts:

"Not sure but:

Every 3"1/2 disk drive has a step rate of 3ms.
Old external 5"1/4 disk drive had a 6ms step rate. (useful for PC
emulation with old software)."

Toby Newman asks about games to test the stereo sound on his new STE:

"Just got an STE to upgrade my FM. What games use stereo sound to allow me to test it?"

Mark Bedingfield tells Toby:

"Stardust
Zero 5
Rock'n roll clams
Sleepwalker
Obsession
Substation
Power up

There's more but that's all off the top of my head at the moment. Truckloads of demo's for the STE lurking around the net too."

Last week, someone asked about mounting a hard drive internally in a 1040 and the conversation turned to using an IOMEGA ZIP drive. Someone asked:

"In the thread reference was made to a ZIP drive being used. Can a standard parallel 100Mb Zip be connected to a STf?"

Peter West answers:

"As I understand it, no. The Atari parallel interface lacks some of the connections and facilities for reading signals from the device to the computer that a full parallel port should have. Only the SCSI version of the ZIP-drive works on Ataris, via a Link or similar ACSI>SCSI adaptor."

Peter Slegg adds:

"I've never owned a parallel port drive but do they have an IDE to parallel converter inside them?"

Doug White asks about floppy drives:

"I've got a 1040 ST that I was using with Mastertracks Pro. The disc drive developed problems and I replaced it with a Chinon or TI drive. I have lately been trying to save my midi files and I am finding on discs with more than one song the songs are gone! There are song listings but they won't open up.

I suspect that I am the victim of the floppy drive problem where it will write to disc when you don't want it to? Is there a way to reclaim these files?"

David Wade tells Doug:

"This is probably the problem. ST drives used to have a disk change line. Later ones don't. I think you need to press "Escape" to tell the ST to re-read the directory, or to force a write. I think there used to be an auto folder utility to solve this...

'Chris' asks Doug:

"To ask a silly question, is the disk full ? I've had music programs
appear to save files when the disk is full but it only writes the name
of the file to floppy, of course it can t write any data as the disk is
full... might be worth a quick check before taking your ST apart.

Also, format a disk in a program like FCOPYIII will test your drive out.
try a few floppies as your floppies could have aged."

While we're on the subject of floppy drives, someone asked last week
about reading Atari extended tracks/sectors on a PC running Windows XP.
They lamented, in part:

"Unfortunately, Windows XP doesn't seem to let you choose tracks and
sectors except for the standard 720 k format."

'Chris' replies:

"yes it does.

click on START
click on RUN
type in "CMD" - press enter
type in "format /?"

someone else even asked the same question a few weeks ago and I even
uploaded a batch file example. I have been using XP for a few years now
formatting all kinda of floppy formats."

Peter West now asks Chris:

"But does XP then read the non-standard floppy? Because I can't get
my son's PC to read 82-track 10 sector floppies formatted on the
Falcon, for instance. Or is there a command-line trick for this as
well?"

Chris explains:

"You have to format floppies on the PC if you want to read them on the
Falcon. It won't work the other way unless you write a MSDOS boot sector
to the floppy. personally I never got that feature to work.

XP is a bit naff on floppy access, there is a program which will write
floppy images (MSA) back onto a floppy to read on the Atari, though the
PC will not read it as its a Atari disk. If you want to read a disc on
both machines, then you will have to format it on the PC. If you are
wanting to transfer files from Falcon to PC, just use normal 1.44
floppies formatted on the PC... not exactly sure what you are trying to
do....

www.cps-electronics.co.uk/temp/a-720k.zip

if it won't let you format higher sector counts then your chances are
your floppy drive does not support them. I am amazed by how naff
floppy drives are today, anything over total generic format and they
refuse to work. get yourself a sony MPF series drive and be sure it
will work correctly."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time,
same station, and you'll be able to hear me lecture you on behaving
yourself on New Year's Eve. [grin]

Until then, keep your ears open so you'll hear what they are saying
when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

                              =~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Wii Goes Online With Opera!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Gamers Share Wii Pain!
                                   Final Fantasy XII for PS2!
                                   And more!

                              =~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                 Nintendo Wii Goes Online With Opera

Gamers who quickly snapped up the Wii console when it went on sale last
month can start surfing the Web on Friday when Nintendo offers the Opera
browser as a free download available through the Wii Shop Channel.

The browser is currently in beta, but a final version will be available
by the end of March and will be free for all Wii owners through the end
of June 2007. After that, those who haven't downloaded it yet will be
able to get it for 500 Wii points - equivalent to $5.

This Adobe Flash-enabled version of the Opera software puts the Internet
onto a TV screen so that families can share the browsing experience. And
with the motion-sensor capabilities of the Wii controller, users can
click on links or to zoom into any part of the screen.

The remote also can be used with an on-screen keyboard to type in text
entries.

Nintendo's Internet Channel, which requires a broadband connection, joins

several other channels that are offered for the Wii: the Disc Channel, the Photo Channel, the Wii Channel, and the Wii Shop Channel.

The Forecast Channel also went live this week, providing forecasts and current weather information that can be accessed using a text list of cities or by using the remote to zoom in on a 3D interactive globe.

The Opera Web browser and the built-in Wi-Fi connectivity could help the Wii compete against Sony's PlayStation 3 and Microsoft's Xbox 360, although the PS3 does offer Internet access and Microsoft has a full-fledged online service - called Xbox 360 Live - where users can download games, movies, and TV shows, many in high definition.

The Wii, which Nintendo released on time and promised to ship in abundance, has been in short supply. Reports indicate that Nintendo sold some 600,000 consoles in the first eight days after its November 19 launch, and is on track to sell four million consoles altogether by the end of the year.

Opera, which has the smallest market share among Web browsers, behind Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Mozilla's Firefox, earlier this month unveiled an upgrade that provides some compelling features.

Opera 9.1 boasts a tabbed interface, a transfer manager for large downloads, a customizable content blocker for keeping ads in check, and a "mouse gestures" feature to give the mouse a little more power.

Video Gamers Share Their Pain As They Get Active

Video gamers relish violence on the screen but now players are becoming victims themselves - of the latest gaming technology in which a wireless, wand-like device is used to direct on-screen action.

Using Nintendo's Wii, the most talked about of three new game consoles out this holiday, players of seemingly harmless games such as bowling and tennis are being left battered and bruised by the controller, not to mention damaging television screens and nearby ceiling fans and computers.

Nintendo has cautioned players on using a wrist strap with the controller and keeping their palms dry but Jim Walsh's blog (www.WiiHaveAProblem.com) is dedicated to sharing some of the amusing - and embarrassing - stories of what he calls "the latest trend in gaming violence."

Walsh, a Cleveland-based operating systems operator, launched the site last month after hearing his first Wii damage story - his friend's remote crashed into his big-screen television - to see what would happen.

He has been flooded with similar stories.

The site has received 3 million page views since it launched, and he receives 20 to 30 e-mails a day detailing woeful tales of over-enthusiastic players and Wii damage.

"Nintendo built a system that's fun," Walsh told Reuters in a phone interview. "You get really into it. Your hands get sweaty, next thing you know your remote goes flying into the dog."

Or your head - which happened to one site contributor, Nicole, while she was bowling.

"I swung really hard to knock down the 50 plus pins and all of a sudden I realized my head hurt," wrote Nicole in a post accompanied by close-up pictures of her bruise.

"I was wearing the tether instead of it flying wildly into the air it stopped and swung back around and hit me in the head." She notes that she was sober at the time.

The site has its fair share of "we were playing Wii and drinking" stories which end up with a broken object or an injured person.

Then there are incidents when the wrist strap attached to the remote breaks, causing pain of the financial sort.

"A friend of mine that never plays video games actually got into playing the Wii," posts Dopefish. "About an hour into the festivities, he was bowling with too much enthusiasm and too little strap-around-the-wrist. BAM. Wii-mote, meet my $3,500 TV."

Since the bowling, throwing, swinging movement of the motion-sensitive remote corresponds directly with the action in the video game, the fate of an innocent television screen, for instance, rests in the hands of the user and the wrist-strap.

Nintendo has since addressed the wrist-strap issue. The company has released a thicker strap and has posted a safety warning on its Web site, highlighting, in bold, all-caps: "Do not let go of the Wii remote itself."

Walsh admitted that some of the Wii injuries and damage shared on his blog might have been prevented by following the safety information, but he also said toning it down may help.

"You have to remember that you're not really serving a ball at 90 miles an hour ... so you don't end up on the front of my Web site," he said.

Wii Mishaps Lead To Busted TVs, Injuries

Jaana Baker is no klutz, note her second-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. She's also an avid video gamer who puts out a Web-based comic called "Level 99" in her spare time.

So how did Baker end up launching the controller of her new Nintendo Wii right into her 37-inch TV? Like some other owners of the new game console and its motion-sensitive wireless remote, Baker took the freedom to move a little too literally.

It was a particularly spirited round of Wii bowling caused her to lose her bearings before unleashing what she had hoped would be a perfect strike.

"It was like a loud crack," she said, recalling the moment the "Wiimote" glanced off her coffee table, snapped its wrist strap and hurtled into her flat-screen TV. "It was kind of surreal, actually. I thought I was dreaming at first."

It appears that Baker is not alone. In recent weeks, the Web has been alight with reports of excited gamers losing their grip on the Wii's controller or smacking their arms into nearby objects.

After issuing a general "calm down" to its customers a week ago, Nintendo Co. has responded by quietly beefing up the controller's fabric wrist strap, spokeswoman Beth Llewelyn said.

And while most executives would cringe if their flagship product suddenly became associated with shattered electronics and the occasional flesh wound, some observers say the lighthearted buzz could deliver a perfect shot of viral marketing.

"What it says is, this thing is so fun that people get carried away," said Adrian Ho of the advertising agency Fallon Worldwide. "A progressive brand manager would look at that and say, 'You know what? Actually, that's pretty good.'"

The offbeat stories certainly haven't hurt sales. The market research company NPD Group estimates that U.S. consumers bought 476,000 Wiis in the two weeks following its Nov. 17 launch. That beat Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3 console, which sold just under 200,000 units in roughly the same period amid widespread shortages.

Some analysts, like P.J. McNealy at American Technology Research, say the Wii isn't exactly a direct competitor with the PS3 because Nintendo purposely avoided getting into a war over which system has the hottest graphics.

Instead, Nintendo has focused on capturing customers outside the traditional niche of quick-fingered young males by playing up the Wii's ability to get people swinging their wireless controllers like swords, baseballs or golf clubs.

That's why the missiles began flying. The Wii's popular sports games, included with the console, appear to be the main source of gamers losing their grip on the devices that look like TV remotes, Nintendo of America's Llewelyn said.

"It's kind of this novel way to play, and I think people are just figuring that out and may have gotten a little overexcited when they were playing," Llewelyn said.

That's what happened to Jessica Chobot, a writer at gaming Web site IGN.com, who sprained and cut a finger on her right hand while trying rally for a comeback victory in Wii baseball.

In the excitement of trying to put a little something extra on her fastball, Chobot said, she got a little too close to her thick wooden coffee table.

"You obviously don't need to go through all the motions, but I did because I was frustrated, and smashed my hand along with the Wii controller right into the table as hard as I possibly could," she said.

The impact sent a few Wii parts flying, but the remote lived up to Nintendo's reputation for durable hardware and quickly snapped back together.

"The controller still works, and that's the important thing," Chobot

said, adding that her finger seems to mending well.

Llewelyn insists Nintendo has only verified a few scattered instances of Wii remotes flying because of faulty wrist straps.

"Because of the nature of the Internet, of course, it gets magnified so one or two occurrences becomes 2,200 experiences," said Billy Pidgeon, an analyst at IDC.

But the company might take heart that gamers seem to be blaming each others' klutziness more than they're criticizing Nintendo's design.

"On one hand, obviously we love that people are talking about our system. But we prefer when it's talking about the great game play experience," Llewelyn said. "Fortunately, I think that's what everybody is really talking about."

Final Fantasy XII for PlayStation 2

Forget what you know about RPGs (Role Playing Games). The latest "Final Fantasy" game brought to you from Square Enix takes most Final Fantasy and RPG standards and throw them out the window. Creating a unique and satisfying experience that's sure to be emulated by other developers, Final Fantasy XII raises the bar a notch.

Graphically, this game is simply stunning. And I don't just mean the FMV sequences;Rather, I'm talking about the character models, the environments, in-game cut scene, the monsters, the animation in and out of battle, everything. I didn't think that this kind of visual detail was possible on PS2 until I played this game. From the very beginning I was bombarded with colorful 3 dimensional environments and landscapes which appeared at first a little overwhelming. Once you take in to account the amount of different NPC (non-player character) mini-games, hunts and side-quests, it adds to the sense that your character is a part of a living breathing world, and help makes the total gaming experience more immersive.

Gone are the random battles that are a staple in so many RPGs. Instead, all the enemies appear on screen at once and if they are in your character's "area" or line of sight, it will approach your party (the aggressive ones attack so make sure you are prepared for what it's coming by checking their stats once you see them).

Most players of MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) such as Warcraft or City of Heroes will be familiar with the concept of of aggressive monsters and the swarm tactics that they employ in "FF XII". Monsters no longer drop money, or "gil" as its called in the game. Instead, once you defeat a monster there is a chance it will drop loot such as a fur pelt or crooked tooth, which you can trade at one of the many stores for money.

If you collect a certain number of special types of items and sell it to a shopkeeper, you might have the opportunity to purchase unique weapons and armor or get more common items at a discount. And when you think about it, it really makes a little more sense that you can get a "tanned hide" from a tyrannosaur as opposed to 200 gil. Why would a dinosaur walk around with money?

Gone also are the predetermined character classes that most RPGs use. In "FF XII" once a character is in your party, you can customize them however you see fit. If you want a crossbow-wielding thief that can cast black magic, go right ahead. Even more important than experience points (another RPG standard that isn't missing but it's significance takes a back seat) is the new License Board system. All the best parts of every character class that you can think of are available if you have enough LPs (license points).

Another completely new and creative feature introduced in this game is the Gambit system. This allows you to determine what actions your party will take when encountering an enemy. For instance, you can set up commands that range from the simple "attack nearest enemy" to the complex "steal from nearest enemy with more than 2000 Hit Points and then cast a Blind spell and then attack." This may sound complex at first but the in-game tutorial does an excellent job of explaining these features and walking you through the initial setup.

All of these new strategies, situations and techniques take a while to get used to (my learning curve was roughly four hours) but once you get comfortable with these differences, begin to add members to your party and take advantage of the Gambit system. You will truly see what a groundbreaking game this is.

The voice acting and production values are outstanding. The gameplay is innovative and unique. The story is compelling and is filled with political intrigue, love, humor and action. The sound effects are clear and crisp, and the score sets the mood and keeps pace with the situations during gameplay. Even "Final Fantasy" classic tunes such as the Chocobo theme are included. With over 40 hours of gameplay, this game should be in every "Final Fantasy" and RPG fans collection.

"Final Fantasy XII" is rated "T" for Teen (Content suitable for ages 13 or older) and is available for the PlayStation 2 game console.

                              =~=~=~=

                        A-ONE's Headline News
                  The Latest in Computer Technology News
                      Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

                Season's Greetings: It's Spam for the Holidays

The holiday season brings festive parties, family gatherings - and a deluge of spam. Unsolicited messages, or spam, which account for nine out of 10 e-mails, fill up the inboxes of computer users more than ever at this time of year, experts say.

"Every year we see a seasonal increase around the holiday season. It's just worse than it's ever been before this year," said Daniel Druker, executive vice president of marketing at Postini, a company that provides message security services.

Spammers spew out millions of e-mails. Some hawk pharmaceuticals and sexual aids, others offer hot stock tips.

The unscrupulous commit identity theft by luring unsuspecting recipients into disclosing personal information, while others commit fraud with the lure of phony offers.

The glut of spam can clog business communications systems to the extent that e-mails at the workplace can be held up for hours, if not days, experts say. "The threat of this is that e-mail becomes no longer productive as a tool, and that is scary because e-mail is ubiquitous. Most businesses could no longer run without it," Druker said.

Spam cost an estimated $17 billion in the United States last year in lost productivity and the expense of measures to fight it, according to San Francisco-based Ferris Research.

Worldwide, the cost was estimated at $50 billion.

Around the holidays, spammers take advantage as people use computers for online shopping, experts say.

"You see a big increase around the holidays of messages where they are trying to fool you into buying things or trick you into providing your ID," said Jerry Upton, executive director of the San Francisco-based Messaging Anti-Abuse Working Group.

"People are busy and I think the abusers take advantage of that," he said.

The amount of spam has exploded in recent months, experts say, as spammers have adopted new tricks. Research by Postini found a record 93 percent of e-mail was spam from September through November.

"The spammers are definitely winning at this point. It's gotten much worse," said Gerald Thain, a professor of consumer law at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who specializes in e-mail issues.

One of the newest dodges is sending spam in the form of an image rather than text, allowing it to get past filters that trap spam by hunting down specific words.

So-called image e-mails account for some 30 percent of junk e-mails, compared with just 2 percent in 2005, Postini said.

Another ploy is called phishing, in which an official-looking e-mail asks recipients for passwords or personal information.

"Pump and dump" e-mails urge recipients to buy certain stocks, driving up the price, while in other schemes spammers hijack other computers - turning them into what pros call zombies - to deliver their messages.

"We recently saw 400,000 new zombies coming online every day," said Atri Chatterjee, senior vice president of marketing at Secure Computing Corp. in Alpharetta, Georgia.

"What you have is a very aggressive use of innocent computers," he said. The battle between spammers and antispammers is like a game of "cops and robbers," said J.J. Schoch, a security expert at Panda Software, a developer of computer anti-virus systems.

"The cops try and outsmart the robbers, the robbers try and outsmart the cops," he said.

Not only has the amount of spam ballooned, but its nature has changed, said Druker.

"First it was hackers trying to show off how smart they were. Then it shifted to annoying marketers," he said. "Now a large percentage of this stuff is coming from criminal networks who are out to steal your money."

Hoax Web Site Jabs Anti-illegal Immigrant U.S. Town

Santa isn't welcome in Hazleton because he's an illegal immigrant just like all the others the Pennsylvania town is trying to get rid of - or so someone would have you believe.

A new Web site, http://www.nosantaforhazleton.com, says the town intends to keep Santa out this Christmas because he represents the illegal immigration the town council believes increases crime and burdens local services.

But the site is a hoax, created by someone in a bid to satirize a local law passed in July that has attracted national attention by imposing penalties on businesses and landlords to deter them from hiring or renting rooms to illegal immigrants.

Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta, who instigated the Illegal Immigration Relief Act Ordinance, said neither he nor the City of Hazleton are involved with the Web site and that while he's not taking it seriously, it may be illegal because it invites online donations. The town has referred it to police.

The site pretends to quote Barletta as saying, "Santa is a dangerous idea whose reign must be put to an end."

A "press release" on the site says a coalition of elected officials and concerned citizens have come together to act against "the nation's most prominent undocumented worker."

Hazleton's immigration act has been temporarily blocked by a federal judge pending a lawsuit against the town brought by immigrant supporters, including the American Civil Liberties Union. It is expected to be heard in early 2007. Hazleton is a former coal-mining town of 31,000 people in the eastern part of the state.

Barletta said he has no idea who created the site, adding: "Whoever did that will certainly be getting coal for Christmas."

Worm Hits Computers' Antivirus Program

A computer worm is attacking some business PCs through a flaw in antivirus software by Symantec Corp., a security company warned Friday.

EEye Digital Security, based in Aliso Viejo, said the worm, dubbed "Big Yellow," began attacking some computer systems on Thursday, seven months

after eEye first discovered the flaw.

Symantec released a patch to address the flaw in May but it's up to its corporate customers to install it. Officials at the Cupertino-based security software company said Friday it had so far received three reports of systems affected by the worm.

"It is definitely a new worm, and it is looking for vulnerable systems, but we're not seeing any evidence of a significant outbreak or infection," said Vincent Weafer, a senior director at Symantec's security response unit.

Big Yellow enters machines through a security hole in the corporate version of Symantec's Norton Antivirus software. Once infected with the worm's "bot" program, a hacker can use it as a way to connect with other computers for malicious attacks.

EEye urged corporate information-technology departments to fix the flaw.

Windows, IE Animations Run Amok

Microsoft's "cute" animations, like the infamous Office Clippy, have aroused more ire than grateful praise, but they didn't actually do any harm - until now.

The part of Windows behind the animated yellow dog helper in Windows search, called Microsoft Agent, gives malicious hackers a route into your PC for spyware or viruses transmitted via a drive-by download.

Agent can also be used by third-party programs for their own help functions. Clippy himself isn't a risk, but a flaw in the Agent ActiveX control that Internet Explorer 6 uses under Windows XP SP2 and Windows 2000 SP4 means the browser can be overwhelmed by a booby-trapped Agent file (.acf). If you browse a poisoned site that hosts such a file, the ActiveX control will crash, thereby opening the door to an attack program - and you don't need to click on any of the page's content.

IE 7 isn't vulnerable to this flaw; to protect yourself, upgrade your browser or download the critical patch from Microsoft through Automatic Updates. Or get the patch and more info at Microsoft Technet. At press time we had not seen any reports of active attacks using this hole.

Clippy's cousins aren't the only pieces of old-school animation coming back to haunt users. Two dangerous IE 6 flaws in Microsoft DirectAnimation were hit with zero-day attacks before Microsoft released a patch. Although DirectAnimation has been superseded by DirectX for showing animations in the browser, it remains in IE--a little like people's tailbones.

Again, if you just view a doctored Web page, you'll be hit by a drive-by download. An attack crashes the DirectAnimation ActiveX controls, and can let a bad guy do anything on your PC that you can do.

If you don't already have it, you can now get the patch for IE 6, a fix that basically shuts down the unnecessary DirectAnimation for good.

As with the Agent bug, Internet Explorer 7 is safe from this flaw, and the new browser is a good security upgrade. But some typical update glitches

have surfaced. Owners of HP printers, scanners, and all-in-one units have discovered that the popular HP Director image management program doesn't display properly with IE 7. HP's fix should be available on HP's Customer Care site by the time you read this; if not, you'll see a workaround.

QuickBooks 2004 and 2005 are likewise incompatible with IE 7. Browser-based features such as Help and Payroll don't function with the new browser. On its Web site, Intuit says that it is working on a patch for the 2005 version but notes that in the meantime you'll need to revert to IE 6. A patch for the 2004 version may not be forthcoming.

In this case, we can't fault Microsoft. IE 7 was available as a beta for company testing for a long while - so HP and Intuit should have taken care of these compatibility problems before now.

You now have a deadline to upgrade your browser: Mozilla announced that it won't release any patches for Firefox 1.5 after April 24, 2007. That's a fast end-of-life given that Firefox 2.0 came out only at the end of October.

The update to version 2 is relatively painless, though, and you'll want to make sure you can keep getting patches. Mozilla just closed critical holes in Firefox 1.0 and 1.5, in its Thunderbird e-mail software, and in the SeaMonkey applications suite - all share the same problematic code. Move to the newest versions using the programs' built-in automatic upgrades, or get the latest Mozilla Downloads.

Expect more bug disclosures than ever: Hackers embarked on an escapade to find and publicize one new bug in kernels (the heart of operating systems) every day during November. Online attackers had a months-long romp creating exploits for browser bugs published in a similar project last summer. For a peek at what's in store this time, check out the Month of Kernel Bugs (MoKB) archive.

Opera Browser Now Has Phishing Filter

The latest version of the Opera Web browser incorporates a technology that warns users when they visit a fraudulent site.

Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer and Mozilla's Firefox both included such a feature, called a phishing filter, in their new releases in October.

Like the others, Opera Software ASA's free Opera 9.1 browser displays a warning when visitors go to a site that may trick them into revealing passwords and other sensitive information. Opera's update was released Monday.

For the lists of bad sites, Opera is tapping into the PhishTank project from OpenDNS LLC. Users submit to PhishTank.com the messages they believe are scams, and others in the PhishTank community examine the message and the site to which it links and vote on whether it is or isn't a scam.

Opera has a sliver of the Web browsing market. According to WebSideStory, Internet Explorer leads with 88 percent of the U.S. share on computers running Microsoft's Windows operating system. Firefox is second at nearly 11 percent. The Norwegian browser maker has made greater inroads on mobile

phones.

                    NJ Worker Put 'Bomb' In Computers

A computer administrator upset over the possibility of losing his job
planted an electronic "bomb" in the systems of one of the nation's
largest prescription drug management companies, prosecutors said Tuesday.

If the so-called "logic bomb" had gone off at Medco Health Solutions Inc.,
it would have wiped out critical patient information, authorities said.

Even after surviving a round of layoffs, Yung-Hsun Lin, 50, kept the code
in the system and tinkered with it in an attempt to set it off, prosecutors
said. The bug eventually was discovered and neutralized by the company.

U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie said the bomb could have caused
widespread financial damage to the company, and possibly harmed a large
number of patients.

Among the targeted databases was one that tracked patient-specific drug
interaction conflicts, prosecutors said. Before dispensing medication,
pharmacists routinely examine that information to determine whether
conflicts exist among a patient's prescribed medicines.

"The potential damage to Medco and the patients and physicians served by
the company cannot be understated," Christie said. "A malicious program
like this can bring a company's operations to a grinding halt and cause
millions of dollars in damage from lost data, system downtime, recovery
and repair."

Lin was arrested at his home Tuesday morning by FBI agents, and was to
appear before a federal magistrate Tuesday afternoon. His arraignment is
scheduled for Jan. 3. He is charged with two counts of computer fraud.

His lawyer, Raymond Wong, said Lin denies introducing any malicious
programming into the computer system. Wong said his client would have known
that such an action could be quickly linked to him.

"He is an administrator; if something happened, it could be traced back,"
said Wong, who added Lin has years of "excellent performance reviews."

Medco spokeswoman Soraya Balzac said the arrest "sends a strong message
that there is zero tolerance for this type of conduct."

The indictment alleges that Lin, who worked in the company's Fair Lawn
office, planted the computer bomb in Medco's servers. It would have wiped
out critical data stored on more than 70 servers, according to Assistant
U.S. Attorney Erez Lieberman. He could not estimate how many patients could
have been affected.

In addition to the drug-interaction information, other data on the
targeted servers included patients' clinical analyses, rebate
applications, billing and managed-care processing.

Prosecutors said that when Franklin Lakes-based Medco was spun off from
Merck & Co. in 2003, Lin feared that layoffs would affect him.

Authorities said that on Oct. 3, 2003, Lin created the bomb designed to delete virtually all data from the 70 targeted servers by modifying existing computer code and adding new code. It allegedly was set to detonate automatically on April 23, 2004, his birthday.

Due to a programming error, it didn't go off. Even after surviving a round of layoffs, prosecutors said, Lin modified the bomb's code to have it detonate on his next birthday. But the company found and disabled it before it could cause any damage.

Last week, a former UBS PaineWebber systems administrator in New Jersey was sentenced to eight years and one month in prison for attempting to profit by detonating a logic-bomb program that caused millions of dollars in damage to the brokerage's computer network in 2002. The ex-employee, Roger Duronio, also was ordered to pay $3.1 million in restitution to his former employer, now known as UBS Financial Services Inc., part of the Swiss banking company UBS AG.

Cybercrooks Hold PC Data Captive

For ransom: your sensitive computer files. In the latest online scam, cybercrooks are breaking into the PCs of small businesses and individuals, locking up data and demanding money in return for freeing it.

So-called ransomware is the latest iteration of extortion on the Internet. Typically, hackers threaten to disrupt the websites of companies with a deluge of data unless they are paid.

With ransomware, however, online crooks implant malicious computer code on websites in hopes of breaking into the PCs of consumers and remotely encrypting a victim's files and photographs. The thieves demand a ransom through an online-payment service such as PayPal or e-gold.

According to security firm Websense, one recent victim was the tech administrator at a company in the Northeast. His PC was infected by malicious code, which scrambled company files. An e-mailed ransom note demanded $200 for the digital keys to unlock the files.

The victim did not pay because he doubted his data would be returned even if he paid, says Dan Hubbard, vice president of security and research at Websense.

Most of the stolen files were recovered from a backup disk, Hubbard says.

Another recent ransomware case occurred at an Internet cafe in South America. The victims' e-mail accounts were held captive, and they received ransom notes in Spanish, according to Websense.

There are no known statistics on ransomware. But officials at Websense, McAfee and other security companies have noted more instances through their field operations in the last several months.

Employees or small businesses are the typical targets of the scam, security experts say. Ransoms are usually small so victims will pay and not report the crime.

Online crooks count on employees taking laptops home and, unprotected by

a company firewall, inadvertently downloading ransomware code from infected websites onto their PCs, says John Thielens, vice president of security firm Tumbleweed Communications.

"Crooks may be toying with it to see if it's successful," Hubbard says. "They may be fishing for sensitive information at a Fortune 500 company for a big payday."

Security experts advise consumers to avoid unfamiliar websites and keep backups of important files on removable devices.

YouTube Turned Crime-fighter In Canada

The website YouTube that turned freaky pets and awkward teenagers into worldwide sensations has now become an unconventional crime-fighter in Canada, triggering alarms over police intrusion of this libertarian haven.

Canadian police posted surveillance video this month on the popular website, in which users share video clips, hoping to nab a murderer.

The one-minute video shows "people of interest" entering a Hamilton, Ontario bar, hours before two young men were stabbed in a brawl outside after a hip hop music concert.

"We decided to post a video on YouTube because we felt it would more likely be seen by the people who attended this concert, who are in their teens and early 20s," Hamilton police Detective Sergeant Jorge Lasso told AFP.

"I have children and they don't watch mainstream media, but they seem to be as informed as I am," he said. "We realized that if we want to target this demographic, we'd have to go to the web, where they get their information."

YouTube and similar websites won superstar status in 2006, helping to transform the Internet from a window on the world into a stage on which people play out their lives and dreams. Time magazine even named user-generated content its Person of the Year for 2006.

More than 100 million user-contributed video clips are viewed daily at the site, which was launched 18 months ago in San Bruno, California and bought for 1.65 billion dollars by Internet giant Google in November.

Authorities in Britain previously posted a mother's desperate appeal for help to catch her son's killer on the site.

Street-racers in Winnipeg, Canada, were also charged with dangerous driving after police identified them in taped stunts posted online. They are expected to appear in court next month.

But, this is the first case in which police have used YouTube as an "investigative tool," said Lasso. And likely, "it won't be the last," he said.

This prediction has romanticists lamenting further encroachment by law enforcement on the Internet's libertarian principles, as one cynical YouTube commentator wrote: "This video is a tool that the police are

using, so beware."

"In one sense, they're enlisting public help. But, when police use it as an investigative tool, there's a danger of a backlash if people believe they're patrolling the net looking for evidence of crimes," explained Wade Deisman, a criminologist at the University of Ottawa.

In fact, experts say police activities online are already widespread.

Monitoring of online chat rooms, for example, has become commonplace in child pornography cases and it is quickly expanding into other domains, credited with helping foil an alleged terror plot in Toronto earlier this year.

All but two of the 18 suspects in that case were under 25 years old.

"People once thought the Internet wouldn't be susceptible to the usual means and mechanisms of government control, that they couldn't embed the coercive power of law enforcement in the Internet," Deisman said.

"But police have succeeded in assembling a wide array of other means and mechanisms to bring it under the rule of law."

YouTube's popularity comes on the heels of the proliferation of digital video cameras, particularly in mobile phones, and greater monitoring of public spaces to help avert crimes, he noted.

Thousands of people have viewed the Hamilton police video and posted a few comments, ranging from plaudits to jeers over the new police tactic, but nobody has yet come forward to identify the men being sought.

Still, Lasso remains hopeful.

"We put a lot of crime information on our police website and nobody has ever come forward as a result of those postings, but on YouTube it has generated a lot of interest," he said.

The murder took place in a parking lot outside of the Hamilton bar on November 17 after two groups got into a fight.

"We found a baseball cap nearby and we want to talk to the person who was wearing it ... We hope someone will recognize his clothes from surveillance video of the person we found inside the bar, and identify him to us," Lasso said.

Blogger Leaves Beta

Blogger quietly slipped out of beta on Wednesday, with little fanfare save for the words "We're out of beta" atop Blogger's home page, and an "official" post with the heading 'Blogger's New Bag of Tricks' on parent company Google's own Google Blog. The upgrade stands as the most significant update to the popular blogging tool since the Menlo Park-based search company purchased it from creators Pyra Labs in February 2003.

The upgrade includes integration with Google accounts, allowing users with existing accounts to log into the service. Also onboard is a new Layout feature, which utilizes Web 2.0 functionality for code-free updates to

blog layouts.

The new Labels tool allows users to tag and sort posts by keywords, and Blogger has also added more template options to help people get started with their blog design. Dynamic Publishing allows users to see changes to their blog almost immediately after they're made, without the lengthy publishing process that marked previous versions.

Private blog restrictions have also been added, allowing users to specify who can see their posts by entering the e-mail addresses of potential readers. New feed options are on board as well, and the service now supports RSS 2.0 and Atom 1.0 standards.

While we had no problem creating a new Blogger account using an existing Google login, posts to Blogger's help page have reported some bugs among the site's existing users, including some difficulty integrating their old blogs to the new version of the software.

How To Write Worse And Improve Your Spinnish

Self-improvement is a common theme on the Web, and there are countless sites offering help for people whose vocabulary is like, whatever.

Websites like http://www.doubletongued.org and http://www.wordspy.com – mined for much of the jargon in this item - often offer regular dictionary doses, by email or other Web software.

Spinnish – "the language used by spin doctors and other political operatives" – is a fast-moving language. Chief table-pounders whose work requires them to be buzzword-compliant need sites like these to grab first-mover advantage in an al-desko array of corporate fuzzwords.

And every self-respecting CxO who works for a self-licking ice cream cone needs to know how and when to wave a dead chicken.

When it comes to exposing corporatese - and the self-serving motivation of many people working in institutions - the Web has for years offered a machine to help the verbally challenged talk the talk, at http://www.dack.com/web/bullshit.html.

Need a strategy? Try "monetize next-generation vortals." Of course, on the Web you have to "empower sticky paradigms" and to do that the systems you morph must be granular and best-of-breed.

If the delights of camouflanguage soon pall, there are also sites where people who can write well get together to generate pitiful prose on purpose.

One currently riding high via www.digg.com - a site whose users vote for stories they find interesting - is a blogger's collection of bad analogies, including the one at the start of this article.

Ostensibly submitted by schoolteachers but something of an urban legend, the list highlights the timeless fun in inappropriate analogies such as: "It was an American tradition, like fathers chasing kids around with power tools."

But for the holy grail of woeful writing, wordsmiths need look no further than http://www.bulwer-lytton.com. Host to an annual contest, the archived entries at the site "where www means wretched writers welcome" are rich pickings.

Here, from Gerald R. Johnson in Vancouver, WA, is an example that epitomizes the contest's spirit:

"It had been a dark and stormy night, but as dawn began to light up the eastern sky, to the west the heavens suddenly cleared, unveiling a pale harvest moon that reposed gently atop the distant mesa like a pumpkin on a toilet with the lid down."

                              =~=~=~=